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AESCULAPIUS MEDICAL CENTER

Internal Medicine

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May 29, 2001

Anesthetic and Life Support Drugs Advisory Committee
Center for Drug Evaluation and Research
Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fisher's Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

ATTN: Kimberly Topper

Dear Members of the Committee:

I am a general internist practicing in Burlington, Vermont. In addition to my general medical practice, I serve as the Medical Director for Hospice of the Champlain Valley and as Medical Director for the Palliative Care Program at Fletcher Allen Health Care.

I have been caring for patients with acute and chronic pain since 1989. In that time, I have encountered literally thousands of people for whom opioid medication was essential to maintaining both their function and their quality of life. I am extremely concerned about the stigmatization of opioid use in patients with chronic pain. For many patients, regular use of opioids on a chronic basis is the only intervention available that enables them to live a normal life.

The sources of chronic pain in these patients are myriad. In some cases, an accident or injury has resulted in a chronically painful condition, which is not amenable to repair or healing. Sometimes these injuries may have been iatrogenic. In other situations, patients have forms of chronic illness, which cause serious pain. In most cases, the opioid medication administered on a regular basis does not eliminate the pain, but does allow the intensity of the pain to be reduced to a level where patients can hold jobs, resume their social role, and have a quality of life which they consider acceptable.

I am well aware of the recent news coverage of the abuse of opioid medication throughout the country. I am very concerned that the DEA and law enforcement officials will respond to this news coverage in a way which harms those unfortunate individuals who need these medications to maintain their comfort and function. Like all physicians, I do not wish to worsen the problem of drug abuse

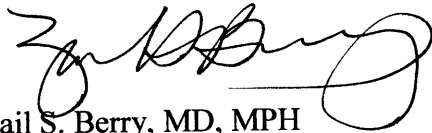
Letter to:
Anesthetic and Life Support Drugs Advisory Committee
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in our society. However, sacrificing the lives of those who have already suffered so much, in order to make opioid medication less available to those who would abuse it, is a remedy which would harm too many to help too few.

I sincerely hope you will consider the needs of the patients who require opioids for legitimate use in your deliberations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zail S. Berry', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Zail S. Berry, MD, MPH
Aesculapius Medical Center
/af